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### 'Annie Laurie'

**Citation for published version:**

Grant, MJ 2019, 'Annie Laurie': A Scots song in the trenches?', *Scottish Music Review*, vol. 5, pp. 52-74.  
<<http://scottishmusicreview.org/Articles/5/Grant%3A%20'Annie%20Laurie'%3A%20A%20Scots%20Song%20in%20the%20Trenches%3F.pdf>>

**Link:**

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**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Scottish Music Review

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# ‘Annie Laurie’: A Scots Song in the Trenches?

M. J. Grant

In 1917, an officer of the Royal Flying Corps – the forerunner of the Royal Air Force – published a songbook called *Tommy's Tunes* which claimed to contain the songs actually sung by serving British soldiers. The book was a great success, and a second edition was soon forthcoming. In the introduction to this volume its editor, F. T. Nettleingham, makes the following startling claim regarding a song which to this day is closely associated with the Great War in the minds of the British public:

‘Tipperary’ was never greatly sung. I think it of interest to place on record how this song has actually stood in Tommy’s estimation and in the favour of the world. Notwithstanding that it is now sung over five continents, and that our French friends – most of them – have Tipperary at their finger tips ... it was never Tommy’s song.

George Cumnock, *Daily Mail* representative at Boulogne when the first of Expeditionary Force troops arrived, heard some of them singing it; new to him, as to most of us, he mentioned it in his report. The publishers naturally seized on such publicity and boomed for all it was worth a hitherto unknown and unwanted song of such mediocre worth that it was like any other of the hundred songs that appear and are sung by third-rate artists, and then disappear ... In other words, it merely ‘happened’ that George Cumnock heard ‘Tipperary’ instead of another equally popular [song], which the same troops started up a few miles further on.<sup>1</sup>

And if this statement is surprising, Nettleingham’s further comments make even more interesting reading:

The outstanding fact is that Scotch tunes (only the Scotties know the words) are the most popular and most often sung, and of them all, ‘Annie Laurie’ has queen of place.

I have heard ‘Annie Laurie’ in peace and war; at home and abroad; in camp and on the march; in a big dining-hall with 300 men and no dinner, and for all time I think it will remain the greatest, most pathetic, soul-stirring refrain ever composed. When harmonised by a hundred or more men uncondacted, yet sung with a tacit understanding of musical light and shade, it remains embedded in one’s memory for aye.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nettleingham 1917, pp. 6–7.

<sup>2</sup> Nettleingham 1917, p. 7.

'Annie Laurie' is not normally thought of as a Great War song. So, was Nettleingham right, or were his informal observations based on what a social scientist would call an unrepresentative sample of military society? In an earlier article on music in the Great War, I quoted this passage but was unable to pursue this particular issue further.<sup>3</sup> The present article is the fruit of subsequent research addressed initially at answering that question, but as it has turned out, it will be only partly about the Great War. For in the act of researching the popularity of 'Annie Laurie' in the Great War, some quite different perspectives have emerged regarding its longer-standing military credentials.

The article begins with a consideration of the reception and popularity of the song in the period immediately preceding 1914. As well as early recordings, it will consider sheet-music sources including several spin-offs that reference the song in their titles. These sources indicate a pre-war connection with the military, a connection whose longer history is then traced back to a much earlier conflict fought not long after the modern version of the song was first published. In conclusion, the article returns to reports and documents concerning the singing of this and other songs in the Great War itself. Writing this potted military and social history of 'Annie Laurie' raises important methodological considerations regarding the study of music and war specifically, and the historical anthropology of music more generally; these will be addressed as and when they arise.

### **'Annie Laurie': some printed and recorded sources, 1838–1916**

The 'Annie Laurie' which concerns us here is the version of the song published in the late 1830s by Alicia Scott née Spottiswoode, also commonly known in our patriarchal society as Lady John Scott. According to her own reminiscences, she had originally written the tune for another ballad but later realised it would go well with the lyrics to 'Annie Laurie' as published by Allan Cunningham. Cunningham published the older version in the third volume of *The Songs of Scotland, Ancient and Modern*, where his commentaries on it mention the tradition that its author was William Douglas, the ultimately jilted lover of the original Anna Laurie, daughter of the first Baronet Laurie of Maxwellton.<sup>4</sup> Scott adapted these lyrics quite substantially, stating frankly that 'I did not like his second verse' – what she actually does is bowdlerise it, focusing on Laurie's brow and neck while the original author's glance fell somewhat lower.<sup>5</sup> Scott's version of the song, first published sometime between 1835 and 1838,<sup>6</sup> quickly became very popular, as is

<sup>3</sup> Grant 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Cunningham 1825, pp. 256–7.

<sup>5</sup> Scott 1900, no page numbers. The comment comes in the reproduction of a letter written by Scott in October 1899.

<sup>6</sup> Judging by the approximate dates for the earliest editions held in various libraries; it was published no later than 1838, in Dun & Thomson 1838, vol. 3, p. 39 (bibliographic

evidenced by a significant number of printed sources and arrangements that began to appear soon afterwards. These include an arrangement by the Aberdonian Finlay Dun, which according to one sheet music source was sung by Jenny Lind.<sup>7</sup>

In my previous article quoting Nettleingham's claims, I suggested that the popularity of 'Annie Laurie' amongst soldiers serving in the First World War might be related to recordings by a later singer, the tenor John McCormack. McCormack recorded the song several times, including a rendition with the Camden Orchestra from 1910. In fact, however, McCormack was far from alone. Even limiting ourselves to the growing number of online digital sources for early commercial recordings, we quickly find a number of other recorded versions from roughly the decade and a half preceding the Great War. These include a 1906 recording by the tenor Alfred Heather;<sup>8</sup> one made in 1905 by the baritone Andrew Black;<sup>9</sup> and an Edison Quartet arrangement released as early as 1897.<sup>10</sup> The National Jukebox hosted by the US Library of Congress also provides access to numerous recordings of 'Annie Laurie' from various artists issued by the Victor label, including several by the Haydn Quartet, like the Edison Quartet a male-voice ensemble. There are also early recordings of newer songs which reference 'Annie Laurie' in the title, such as Arthur C. Clough's performance of 'When the Meadow Larks Are Calling, Annie Laurie' from 1909;<sup>11</sup> also, a military band medley from 1916 which includes a tune called 'When I Dream of "Annie Laurie"'.<sup>12</sup>

Sheet music sources also indicate the (continuing) popularity of 'Annie Laurie' in the period preceding the Great War. In researching this topic, I focused primarily on printed sources from around 1890 onwards rather than attempting to trace the whole curve of the song's reception in the later nineteenth century. Many of the editions held in the British Library are for vocal ensemble or male voice ensemble: this would seem to be a side-effect of the enormous popularity of part-singing in this period, rather than indicating any connection between this particular song and this formation (which would have been interesting, certainly, given Nettleingham's descriptions of the multipart renditions he had heard in

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source: NLS Scottish Song Index, <http://www.nls.uk/collections/music/songindex/fullrecord.cfm?searcher=%AC&idnum=7> (accessed 3 June 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Dun 1850s.

<sup>8</sup> Heather 1906.

<sup>9</sup> Black 1905.

<sup>10</sup> Edison Quartet 1897.

<sup>11</sup> Clough 1909.

<sup>12</sup> Victor Military Band 1915. It is interesting, given the longer historical context discussed below, that there do not seem to have been many military band recordings of the song at this point. The US Air Force Orchestra did, however, include the version on its Glenn Miller tribute album, released in 1999 (US Air Force Orchestra 1999). Clearly the song remained popular into the Second World War as well.

army contexts). Most of these editions come from extensive series produced by music publishers to cater for this trend: they include, for example, a four-part arrangement for male voices published as no. 188 in the series *The Apollo Club*,<sup>13</sup> and an arrangement by H. Stather in the series *Wood's Collection of Glees, Anthems, Tunes, Part Songs &c.*<sup>14</sup> In keeping with the practices of the day, many of the arrangements are notated in sol-fa, or in both sol-fa and staff notation. The general, continued popularity of the song also explains why it appears in some, but by no means all, of the many songbooks produced ostensibly for soldiers during the Great War itself. Generally, though, 'Annie Laurie' appears only in the more extensive collections where a number of popular 'national' songs are included.<sup>15</sup>

When we turn to sheet music editions not of 'Annie Laurie' itself, but of songs which reference it in their titles, a rather different story emerges. Songs of this type are very useful for research into the popularity and cultural significance of songs, since they provide additional information on the familiarity of a song, and the contexts with which it was associated. Printed sources in the British Library indicate that there were at least two new songs referencing 'Annie Laurie' which appeared during the War: 'The Wedding of Annie Laurie' by A. J. Mills (lyrics) and Bennett Scott (music), published in 1914;<sup>16</sup> and 'They All Sang Annie Laurie', by J. Will Callahan (lyrics) and F. Henri Klickmann (music), published in 1915 (and available online via a different library).<sup>17</sup> The former is little more than a description of the gathering of the clans for the wedding, full of faux Scottish imagery topped off with the fact that the groom is another figure well-known from Scots song, Robin Adair. 'They All Sang Annie Laurie', on the other hand, is highly relevant for the present discussion. The cover image (which can be viewed by following the link provided in note 17) depicts a number of soldiers, one of whom is injured,

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<sup>13</sup> Apollo Club 1902.

<sup>14</sup> Wood's Collection 1907.

<sup>15</sup> For example, 'Annie Laurie' is the twelfth of forty-five marching songs published in *Marching Songs and Tommies Tunes* (*Marching Songs* 1914, p. XX). Other Scottish songs in the collection include 'The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond', 'Coming Through the Rye', 'There's Nae Luck About the House', 'The Campbells are Coming' and 'Auld Lang Syne'. Several, but by no means all, of these have more or less explicit military connotations. 'Annie Laurie' is also number 58 of a total of ninety-one songs in *The Camp Song-Book* published in several editions by the Y.M.C.A. for use in the relief camps they ran behind the front (I consulted the edition held in the British Library, shelfmark A.626.j.1; *Camp Song-Book* 1916). Several other publications, all sharing the title *Marching Songs for Soldiers*, also include 'Annie Laurie', such as *Marching Songs for Soldiers* (*Marching Songs* 1915). The differing typesets of songs within this collection suggest the plates had been speedily taken over from other collections: music publishing was, after all, part of the war economy.

<sup>16</sup> Mills and Scott 1914.

<sup>17</sup> Klickmann 1915.

sitting around a campfire singing; in the flames, the face of a young woman can be made out. The song's structure and harmonic language are in keeping with what we might expect from popular songs in this period; predictably, there is a direct quotation from the melody of Scott's 'Annie Laurie' both in the piano introduction and again in the vocal line at the end of the chorus. The music also includes what can be heard as a passing reference to 'Tipperary', which is also referenced in the text of the chorus.

It is the text of 'They All Sang Annie Laurie' that is of most relevance for the present discussion. It describes over several verses of poor quality the scene depicted on the cover, but more importantly, the lyrics are derived directly from a poem called 'The Song of the Camp' by the American poet Bayard Taylor:<sup>18</sup> the later song effectively plagiarises the contents of the earlier poem. Taylor's poem focuses on soldiers in camp on the night before a battle, and specifically references 'Annie Laurie', in the fifth verse:

They sang of love, and not of fame;  
 Forgot was Britain's glory:  
 Each heart recalled a different name,  
 But all sang 'Annie Laurie'.

and again in the penultimate verse. 'Annie Laurie', then, is the 'song of the camp' mentioned in the poem's title. The war in question is the Crimean War, and one commentator, writing in tribute to Taylor following his death around two decades later, suggested that this poem was 'long since admitted to be the best poem called forth by the famous Crimean campaign'.<sup>19</sup> Taylor's poem seems to have proved highly popular, and there was at least one musical setting of it in the period immediately preceding the Great War, by Humphrey John Stewart, published in 1912.<sup>20</sup> Stewart's setting, for male voice choir with baritone solo, and orchestral or piano accompaniment, introduces the melody of 'Annie Laurie' as a hummed interlude at the appropriate point in the text.

The authors of 'They All Sang Annie Laurie' were clearly aware of Taylor's poem, and its imagery throws light on another early-twentieth century song, 'Annie Laurie's My Sweetheart's Name' by Bartley C. Costello (lyrics) and Ed Rogers (music).<sup>21</sup> This song, too, was originally published in the USA, and republished in Britain; both editions are held in the British Library. For copyright reasons, it is not possible to provide a copy of this song or its cover, a cover interesting not least because of the similarities to that of 'They All Sang Annie Laurie'. It presents us with yet another campfire scene: in the US edition, a number of men with moustaches and kilts sit around the campfire, one playing the bagpipes, while

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<sup>18</sup> Taylor 1900.

<sup>19</sup> Clark 1879.

<sup>20</sup> Stewart 1912.

<sup>21</sup> Costello & Rogers 1903.

two others hold what appear to be letters; in the British edition there is only one, solitary man, without bagpipes but wearing a kilt. The lyrics, too, deal with much the same scene: soldiers sitting around a campfire, reading letters from home; one soldier is remembering his sweetheart Annie Laurie, and also dedicates a tune on the bagpipes to her.

We have, then, a complex of poems and songs that more or less consciously present us with the same image: 'Annie Laurie' as a song sung by soldiers on campaign and in camp as they reflect and think on their sweethearts back home; as we have seen, this is a tradition which, through Taylor's poem, can be dated back to the Crimean War. It is to this War that our focus now turns.

### **'Annie Laurie' and the Crimean War**

The Crimean War of 1854–6 was the first major campaign involving British forces since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Now synonymous in popular consciousness with Alfred Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', with its stark description of the battle of Balaclava, the Crimean campaign is also remembered primarily for the horrific conditions in the trenches during the year-long Siege of Sevastopol. This was the situation which gave rise to Taylor's poem, but the connection between 'Annie Laurie' and the war in Crimea goes much deeper; in fact, it is probably no exaggeration to say that at the time, this song became as synonymous with the campaign as Tennyson's poem did thereafter.

Alicia Scott's version of 'Annie Laurie' was published less than two decades before the Crimean War started, and the song was riding on a wave of popularity in the years immediately before its outbreak, not least in the sphere of military music. Military-style arrangements of the song begin to appear from around 1852, and some of these – available through the British Library – are listed in Table 1. Of the arrangements listed here, Cavalli's was probably the first, and is interesting also for the additional contextual information available for it. The 1854 edition of the score bears a dedication 'to Colonel James Campbell K.H. and the Officers of the 95th Regiment', a Derbyshire Regiment which went on to serve in the Crimea; Col. Campbell himself had died in November 1853, after Cavalli's arrangement was first published. More importantly, an advertisement for what was presumably the first edition of his arrangement stated that 'this favourite and popular march is constantly performed by the bands of Her Majesty's Household Troops and Regiments of the Line' (*The Times*, 3 January 1852, p. 2). The extensive advertising conducted by Cavalli's publishers may directly or indirectly have triggered two other arrangements from 1852, though there may have been other triggers as well.

*Table 1* Some military-style arrangements of 'Annie Laurie' from the period immediately before and during the Crimean War

- (1852) W. H. Montgomery, *March for the Piano Forte, founded on the popular Scotch air, Annie Laurie, as played by the regimental bands*. London: D'Almaine & Co. BLh.723.o.(16)
- (1852) C. H. R. Marriot, *The Annie Laurie March*. London: Ransford & Son. BL h.723.n.(17.)
- (1854; original publication probably 1852) P. Cavalli, *The Annie Laurie March*. London: Campbell, Ransford & Co. ('Scottish Music Sellers (by Appointment) to the Highland, Caledonian and Scottish Societies of London.') BL h.954.(47)
- (1855) N. N. Bonaparte's France March; & the Annie Laurie March (*The Musical Bouquet*, No. 330). London: Musical Bouquet Office & J. Allen. BL H.2345.330
- (1855) B. McKenzie, *Annie Laurie March, as Played by the Military Bands*. London: B. Williams. BL g.232.e.(4)

Military bands played a very significant role in the public performance and distribution of music in nineteenth-century Europe; the mid-to-late nineteenth century was, in many ways, the highpoint of military band music. And there is ample evidence from newspaper reports of the 1850s to back up the claims made by the publishers of these arrangements regarding the military use of the song. I will return to this in a moment: first, however, we need to address newspaper sources that deal not with the music provided by military bands, but the songs that soldiers themselves chose to sing.<sup>22</sup>

Songs were – and are – important to soldiers. A letter from a soldier serving with the Highland Brigade in the Crimea, published in the *Inverness Courier* on 21 February 1856, though originally sent to a correspondent for the *Banffshire Journal*, recounted how the 93rd's many huts formed practically a small town, with main arteries named Holyrood and Canongate, streets named after major Scottish towns, and smaller huts generally named after popular Scottish songs, including 'Tullochgorum', 'Maggie Lauder' and – predictably – 'Annie Laurie'. There are also ample descriptions of more active recourse to songs, however. Another letter from a Scottish soldier serving in the Crimea, published in the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* on 24 January 1855, specifically mentions the singing of 'Annie Laurie', but this is hardly surprising given that the event recounted was the chance encounter of two soldiers from Nithsdale, and one of them from Maxwellton itself. I quote part of this letter here due to its relevance for my later comments on how songs often prove to be important tools for dealing with the

<sup>22</sup> The newspaper sources discussed in this article are drawn from searches of digitalized material in the British Newspaper Archive and the Times Digital Archive.



experiences soldiers undergo. Here, one of the two soldiers is in the midst of recounting his experiences in the trenches before Sevastopol:

'Tis no uncommon thing', said Geordie, 'to see seven of eight men brought out of the trenches dead from cold and fatigue, and yet they delay the storming of the place, and call it 'a saving of life'. I was sick of the subject; and, handing Geordie the bottle to drink, asked him to give us a song. After drinking, he sang 'Annie Laurie' in the sweetest manner. He then asked my comrade for one in return, which request my comrade complied with by singing Burns's beautiful old ballad, 'When wild war's deadly blast was blawn', which he did in a manner that filled all our hearts, and before he had done the tears were running down the cheeks of all three of us like big school-boys leaving home.

A more important source for the present enquiry is a letter from another soldier published in several newspapers in November 1855. I have based the comments below on the letter as published in the *Alnwick Mercury* of 1 November 1855, probably the originating source; the same letter, or excerpts from it, were published in other British regional newspapers including the *Elgin Courier* (9 November 1855) and the *Grantham Journal* (10 November 1855). This letter would appear to be the source for the oft-repeated story regarding the song being sung in the trenches themselves, and I take the liberty of a more extensive quotation from it:

The singing of old songs, catches, glees, and choruses, forms a principal feature in the amusements of the Camp. During the long evenings of the past summer our men used to sit in some old redoubt or abandoned trench, and there the song and toast went round, and once or twice I heard some original and extemporaneous verses *apropos* to the time and place, to our Government at home, to our Generals at head-quarters, to the Czar in his palace, and to Johnny Russ in front, which were not only witty and satirical, but highly indicative of poetic genius. [He then discusses a parody on *The British Grenadiers* heard against the backdrop of Russian shelling, which he likens to 'most brilliant fireworks'].

But of all songs the favourite song at the Camp is 'Annie Laurie'. Words and music combine to render it popular; for every soldier has a sweetheart, and almost every soldier possesses the organ of tune. Every new draught [*sic*] from England marches into regimental quarters at the Camp, the band playing this old and recently modernised Scotch melody. I heard the song sung on the evening of the 7th of September, under circumstances so peculiar that I never can forget them. Codrington had visited us on parade in the afternoon, and addressed the men. We were told that on the next day the assault was to be made on the Great Redan [...]. About eight o'clock in the evening I walked towards the Victoria Redoubt, to gaze for the last time on the terrible batteries of Sebastopol. Hundreds of soldiers were sitting on the other side of the hill looking down on the doomed city. A song was proposed, silence obtained, and a corporal in the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade started 'Annie Laurie'. He had a tenor voice, tolerably good, and sang with expression, but the chorus was taken up by the audience in a much lower key, and hundreds of voices in the most exact time and harmony sang together:

And for bonnie Annie Laurie  
I'd lay me down and dee!

The effect was extraordinary; at least I felt it so. I never heard any chorus in an oratorio rendered with greater solemnity. The heart of each singer was evidently far away over the sea. It was more like a psalm than a ballad; for at such a time, on the eve of a great battle, a soldier thinks only of his love and his God.<sup>23</sup>

As the writer notes, the call to retire to quarters came immediately after; thus the song effectively formed, here, something like the solemn conclusion of a ceremonial tattoo; and if the men's minds were elsewhere, their singing bodies were very much in the Crimea, forming a part of that larger whole whose continued unity on the battlefield would be their best defence in the hours to come. Bayard Taylor's poem was in all probability inspired by this letter; his poem was published in a number of newspapers in May 1856, including the *Belfast News-Letter* of 14 May 1856 and the *Leicester Chronicle* of 24 May 1856, thus ensuring that the story of the 'song of the camp' continued to be spread by these means as well.

Newspaper reports of the time – too many to list in full – confirm the general gist of the comments in Carr's letter as they frequently mention 'Annie Laurie' being played both on parading occasions and when troops were on the move. The more interesting of these references concern homecoming celebrations, and sometimes reflect stories that had been circulating about the song's role during the campaign. For example, reporting on the Guards' homecoming in London, which included a royal reception in Hyde Park, the *Cambridge Independent Press* of 12 July 1856 stated that

The march out of the park was a splendid sight. The bands played the favourite air of 'Annie Laurie', which, it will ever be remembered, was chorused by the troops in the Crimea actually while waiting to storm the Redan! and 'Home, sweet Home', which brought tears to many eyes.

Meanwhile, in Leeds, returning troops greeted with a procession 'commenced their march through the town to the inspiring airs of 'Home Sweet Home', 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'Annie Laurie', according to a report in the *Leeds Times* of 26 July 1856. The conjunction of these three songs is far from irrelevant. In the 1850s, *Auld Lang Syne* was already well on its way to being one of the three most important patriotic songs in Great Britain, routinely sung or played along with *God Save the Queen* and *Rule Britannia*, often as troops left barracks as well as when they returned there.<sup>24</sup> 'Home Sweet Home' was one of a very few sentimental popular songs that came close to 'Auld Lang Syne' in popularity around this time. Both songs, by virtue of lyrical content or emerging traditional use, became connected to military rituals of parting and homecoming. That 'Annie Laurie' be

<sup>23</sup> Carr 1855, p. 215. Letter to his sister from the son of Ralph Carr, a resident of Hedgeley by Alnwick.

<sup>24</sup> See Grant 2010,

included as it were in the same breath, speaks volumes about its significance at this time.

Reports on formal dinners, which interspersed toasts with musical numbers, provide further evidence on the popularity of the song in military circles. Such dinners were often described in great detail in the newspapers of the day – a highly useful resource for researchers into songs, their popularity and their cultural contexts. For example, 'Annie Laurie' is mentioned in connection with a dinner for officers which was reported in the *Freeman's Journal* on 16 August 1856. This particular dinner was in honour of officers from County Carlow who had recently arrived from the Crimea. Also in attendance – because they had on that very day arrived at the local barracks – were four officers of the Royal Horse Artillery who were not Carlow men but had also served in the Crimea, including a Captain Mercer: it is to these officers that a toast is dedicated with 'three times three' and followed by 'Annie Laurie'. The report mentions this and the other musical interludes as being 'airs', implying that they were played rather than sung. The others mentioned are 'The British Grenadiers', for the toast to the Duke of Cambridge; 'The flag that braved a thousand years', and 'See the conquering hero comes'. It is worth noting that these other songs and tunes are implicitly connected to the military and soldiering. 'Annie Laurie' was also one of the many tunes interspersed between speeches and toasts at a dinner in honour of another officer returning from the Crimea, Lieutenant Palmer, son of baronet Sir Robert Palmer; an extensive account of this dinner, the speeches, and the music played by the Militia Band, was printed in the *Chester Chronicle* on 27 October 1855, while the Crimean campaign was still underway. Likewise, an extensive report on a 'Dinner to the Guards' which appeared in *The Times* in August 1856 mentions that on arrival at the dinner, 'each regiment was preceded by its band, the Grenadiers playing "British Grenadiers", the Coldstreams "Home Sweet Home", and the Fusileers "Annie Laurie", which last air is in special favour' (my emphasis).<sup>25</sup>

The connection thus clearly established between 'Annie Laurie' and the military in general, and the Crimean campaign in particular, seems to have faded a little by the time of the Great War; but as we have seen, elements of this tradition resurfaced in later songs and accounts. If the spread of the tradition was connected at least in part to Bayard Taylor's poem, this might explain why US-based songwriters turned to his image of the soldiers reminiscing around the campfire when creating their new versions, albeit dropping the Crimean references while doing so. The connection between 'Annie Laurie' and the Crimean War was also flagged up by the folksong collector and expert Frank Kidson, in an article that appeared not long after the outbreak of the Great War. From 1912 to 1925, Kidson published a series of articles in the magazine *The Choir*, all of which have now

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<sup>25</sup> 'Dinner to the Guards' 1856, p. 7.

been collated and republished online. In December 1914, Kidson's article was entitled 'The Collector on War Songs', and it includes the following passage:

All sorts of inappropriate songs have been associated with wars. For example, 'Annie Laurie' is strongly linked with the Crimean War; so much so, in fact, that I have seen a letter written by Lady John Scott, the authoress, in reply to a query, in which she says that she composed the tune and adapted the words 'during the period of the war in the Crimea'. She had quite forgotten that it was composed and published as early as 1838, in the third volume of Paterson & Roy's *Vocal Melodies of Scotland*. It is narrated that a sergeant commenced singing 'Annie Laurie' in the trenches before Sebastopol, and that presently the whole line was declaring fervently that 'for bonnie Annie Laurie they would lay them down and die'.<sup>26</sup>

Kidson does not give a reference for this letter reputedly written by Lady John Scott. He may have been misquoting from the 1899 letter reprinted in *The Burial of Lady John Scott*, referenced previously: in that letter, Scott states rather that she provided it for a publication to raise funds for the widows and orphans of those who had died; the implication is certainly not that she wrote it during the war. What certainly *is* true is that Scott issued a collection of six songs 'expressly in Aid of the Wives and Families of the Soldiers ordered to the east', to quote from the advertisement placed in *The Times* on Friday 14 April 1854.<sup>27</sup> The context provided by the surrounding advertisements underlines that Scott was not alone in responding to the war with a new publication or hastily remarketing an old one, though few others did so specifically for charitable purposes.

### 'Annie Laurie' in the Great War

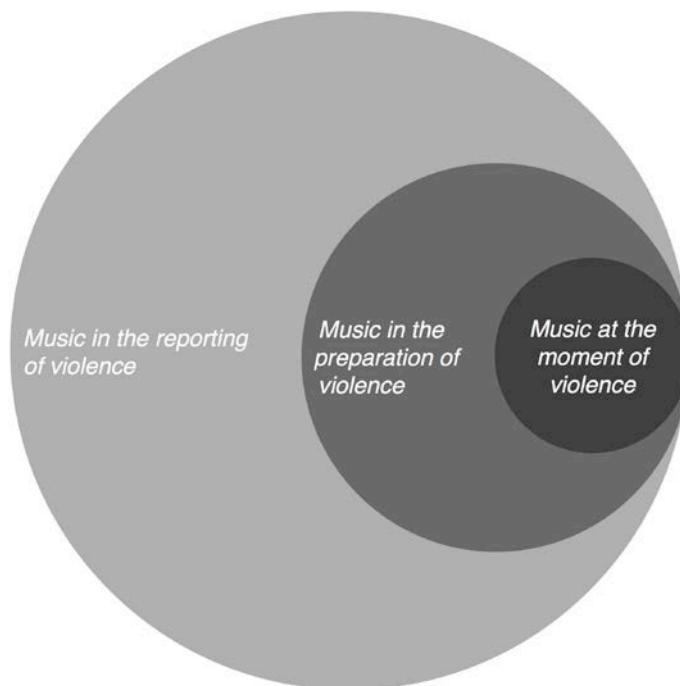
The above account still leaves the original question unanswered: whether Nettlesham was right, and 'Annie Laurie' was much more Tommy's song than 'Tipperary' ever was. Given the song's reception history, it is tempting to suggest that he was merely serving up a long-established trope, though there is no obvious reason why he would do so. Before I return specifically to the topic of whether or not British soldiers really did sing 'Annie Laurie' as frequently and enthusiastically as Nettlesham suggested, I want to say a few words about the nature of the sources just discussed and in particular, those still to come.

When I talk about music and war, I frequently use the model in Figure 1 in order to distinguish between at least three separate situations and contexts: music in the moment of violence itself (for example, the piper who plays during battle), music in the preparation of violence (concerning practices and activities to prepare for battle or recover from it) and music in the reporting of violence, the

<sup>26</sup> Kidson 1914.

<sup>27</sup> The advertisement appeared on p. 3. The other songs were listed as 'Inno del beati', 'Her eyes the glow-worm lead thee', 'Katherine Logie', 'Jeannie Cameron's Death Song' and 'Shame on ye gallants'.

largest of the spheres but also the one furthest removed, geographically and sometimes also temporally, from the front where the military action takes place. The phrase 'reporting' serves to indicate this rupture, and the concomitant fact that without further corroboration, it is impossible to know whether events recounted musically, or anecdotes about music in battle, are based in fact, and to what extent. Generally speaking, the closer we come to the moment of violence, the less research and empirical evidence we find on music's use and impact – not least because it is far from easy to uncover such evidence, particularly where it is not possible to conduct interviews with eyewitnesses.<sup>28</sup> Historical anthropological methods and sources can nevertheless reveal much more than we might first expect if we only make the effort – particularly for a relatively recent period in history. Nevertheless, when what interests us is people's lived experience, we are at the mercy of what they by intent or accident have left behind, or what they or previous researchers, archivists and others have deemed important or interesting.



*Figure 1* The tripartite model for researching music and war

<sup>28</sup> On this subject, see, for example, Grant 2015.

When it comes to how 'Annie Laurie' is or is not referenced in memoirs and other sources from the First World War, I have only scratched the surface of the material available; in those books and papers which I have consulted, however, there were no strong indications to support what Nettleingham claimed regarding the popularity of 'Annie Laurie'. This may in part be due to the limitations of my search: the popularity of 'Annie Laurie' in military contexts around the time of the Crimean War was far from limited to Scottish regiments (on the contrary), while for the purposes of my own research I focused largely if not exclusively on sources from men who served in Scottish regiments. These sources certainly confirmed the continued, enormous importance of singing both on the march and in camp, but in general only a few songs are mentioned by name, and 'Annie Laurie' is rarely among them. This has a lot to do with the way these things are reported, but if 'Annie Laurie' were really as significant as Nettleingham suggested, we would expect more references to it.

A few words are necessary here on the other part of Nettleingham's claim: that 'Tipperary' was nowhere near as popular as was often suggested. This is a difficult claim to assess. He is certainly not the only one to make it: Lachlan Maclean Watt, a Scottish minister who worked in Y.M.C.A. huts behind the Western front, suggested in a book published in 1915 that:

It was easy to distinguish the new arrivals in country [i.e. France], mainly by two things – their eagerness to speak French to everybody they met, and their apparently considering that it was the proper thing to chant, or whistle as they marched, 'It's a long way to Tipperary', long after that song had practically been forgotten by the military, having been sung stale.<sup>29</sup>

It could be that this effect had to do also with a difference between the original British forces and those of the New Army: this is suggested by comments from a Captain Dryden, responding some years later to the author of the *Daily Mail* article which Nettleingham believed to have been the start of the craze, and collated – unfortunately without reference to an original source – on a website dedicated to the history and use of the song.<sup>30</sup>

We should bear in mind when weighing up these sources that there was still widespread resistance – or to put it less diplomatically, snobbery – amongst the officer classes as regards music hall songs and similar. Several publications from the early twentieth century suggest that the songs sung by soldiers were a barrier to their 'education', remarks which clearly echo the views on popular songs espoused, for example, by leading lights in the self-proclaimed folksong movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> It also seems to have

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<sup>29</sup> Watt 1915, pp. 82–83.

<sup>30</sup> Pybus 2012; the page in question is called 'The Great War', and appears to have been linked wrongly within the site.

<sup>31</sup> Discussed further in Grant 2017.

been a general presumption that music hall songs were of less value, and less likely to stay the course than earlier 'national' songs or 'folksongs'.<sup>32</sup> Downplaying a song like 'Tipperary' and singing the praises of a more 'acceptable' song such as 'Annie Laurie', would certainly fit into this mould, though it is not easy to reconcile with the editorial stance taken by Nettleingham himself: the songs he collects in *Tommy Tunes* are a veritable treasure trove of scurrilous, dark and often downright rude parodies on everything from hymn tunes to exactly the kinds of popular songs that others wanted to banish from the ranks.

One memoir which does mention 'Annie Laurie' as well as 'Tipperary', and many other songs, is *The Truth about the Trenches* by H. Drummond Gauld, who served with a Berwickshire regiment. The first of two specific references to 'Annie Laurie' in this memoir is interesting not least because it shows under what circumstances people are likely not only to remember but also to name specific songs in their accounts. On this occasion, the soldiers have been on the move to Ypres; Gauld recounts that on the way there, they had sung 'Tipperary', amongst other things. They arrive to find the former barracks pretty much in ruins, and then the following happens:

The following afternoon an old piano was discovered in an unused part of the building and was at once pressed into service. The unwonted sound of music in such surroundings brought a throng of enraptured Berwickshires round the rickety instrument and a concert was speedily organised. Several songs were sung and applauded and the strains of 'Annie Laurie' were rising melodiously into the air when an armour-piercing shell hit the vaulted roof directly overhead and sent an avalanche of bricks and mortar into the centre of the throng. One man was killed outright and several were crushed and buried under the heavy fall. ... It all happened with such startling suddenness that for some seconds it was impossible to realise exactly what had happened. In the twinkling of an eye the deep blended chorus of a song had given place to cries of agony. Ere the injured could be reached a second hit on the gaping roof sent a further mass of débris on to

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<sup>32</sup> This at least is the impression given by written responses on the question of songs in the army that were published in Evatt 1906. Evatt himself, who was Surgeon-General, states in his text that 'only songs that have by their essential hold on the hearts of the people survived through long years should be sung by our soldiers ... If one thought that the singing of the merely transitory music-hall song was to be the result of this paper, then it would be far better not to write it' (pp. 1–2). His views are echoed in responses to his proposals given by General Lord Methuen, Colonel Sir George Sydenham Clarke, and J. H. Fowles, bandmaster of the 2nd Battalion Seaforth Highlanders, among others, all of whom suggest that working-class soldiers in particular only sing music-hall songs because they have not been exposed to 'better' music. Cecil Sharp also contributed a response which applauded the idea that music-hall songs be superseded, though he warned that this might be difficult. His solution – as one might expect – is to argue for the use of what he regarded as 'real' folk-songs, if possible those from the regiments' own localities.

the rescuers below, overwhelming many of them in their turn. In spite of the increasing number of casualties the dangerous work of rescue went on with redoubled vigour that revealed a strange unconscious ferocity in the brave little party.<sup>33</sup>

This is not the only time Gauld mentions 'Annie Laurie'. Later, describing the unit's time at Berneville, he writes:

On wild evenings, when the call of the estaminets was drowned out by the roaring gale and driving snow, many a jolly party gathered in the barn round the fire-sputtering faggots. The welkin rang with tales of merry escapades and oft-sung soldiers' songs. 'Sing us a song of Bonnie Scotland', 'Annie Laurie', and the 'Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomon' [sic] were prime favourites, and after 'Lights Out' had sounded and the smouldering logs glowed warmly on the walls the concert was usually continued from beneath the piles of blankets.<sup>34</sup>

Another passage, which does not mention the song specifically, does, however, recollect the imagery used by Taylor and others in describing the psychological mechanisms at play in this setting. In this case, and not dissimilar to the reports that emerged from Sevastopol, the context is also the night before an offensive:

The remainder of the day was spent in a confusion of noise and bustle occasioned by a desire to conceal sentiment, and in making final adjustments to rifle slings and shoulder straps. In the evening we watched the sun go down to his rest with mingled feelings. Many saw it for the last time, and perhaps their doom was whispered to them as they gazed upon it. Round the smoking braziers in the semi-darkness of the cellars, men relieved their feelings by singing in chorus the old songs, and the plaintive notes of 'The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond' mingled wildly with the screaming of the shells. That night many a well-loved mother's son from the city desk or college bench, and many a tough old die-hard, saw visions in the glow of the sinking wood-fire, visions of old times in a dear old land, where the hoarse voices of the German guns would never rouse an echo.<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, there is an element of poetic licence, or at least poetic editing, in this account. That Gauld singles out 'Loch Lomond' for mention here cannot fail to resonate when one knows that the 'low road' referenced in the song is generally taken to indicate that its protagonist has died, and for that reason will never meet his true love again. But there are nevertheless elements of this description which tally only too well with what we know of soldiers' experience of war, including that many soldiers from the Great War reported having premonitions about their ultimate fate.

A more obviously poetic take on a similar situation comes from the pen of Ivor Gurney, whose poem with the simple title 'Annie Laurie' was first published

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<sup>33</sup> Gauld 1922, p. 108.

<sup>34</sup> Gauld 1922, p. 222.

<sup>35</sup> Gauld 1922, p. 77.



in 1919.<sup>36</sup> Gurney's original manuscript can be viewed online via the First World War Digital Poetry Archive hosted by the University of Oxford.<sup>37</sup> The song is named directly only in the poem's title, but referenced within as 'a song of old immortal dedication', the singing of which suddenly 'seizes' the men in the still of the night just before sleep. This takes place in a barn – presumably, where the men are resting on a march, or possibly their appointed 'barracks' on the Western Front – lit by naked flames rather than the campfire of other songs and poems discussed previously; instead, to quote the closing lines:

No tears we show, no flame in us  
This hour of stars and music set apart.

Gurney's lines capture poignantly the emotions of such moments and the role of music and song within them. It is a moment of respite, certainly, but the soldiers' emotional restraint ('No tears we show') is immediately countered with an image that speaks of something quite different: an emptiness and absence that persists for all that the soldiers are enjoying their rest and their momentary, relative safety. These few words speak volumes to the state of mind of these soldiers overall, deep in debt to their normal human reserves of strength and stability.<sup>38</sup> In so doing, Gurney gives us more than an inkling of the critical importance of music and song at this juncture, hinted at certainly in the writings of others, and recognised by many a military leader who prioritised music as a therapy for soldiers returning from the front, in the form of entertainment behind the lines, or music played on the retreat march to get there.<sup>39</sup>

Investigating the songs sung by soldiers is important precisely as a way further to understand these processes and strategies. Reflecting on the disjuncture that often exists with how the use of such songs is reported, opens up additional perspectives regarding the mediation of the experience of war. The military career of 'Annie Laurie' is an example of what I call the inherited significance of a song: a meaning that is found not in the elements of the song itself, its military connotations emerging from the specific social contexts in which it is sung or otherwise referenced. This aspect of what this particular song meant to previous generations has now faded from memory, superseded, perhaps, by other songs

<sup>36</sup> I am grateful to David Hammond for drawing my attention to this poem.

<sup>37</sup> Gurney 1919.

<sup>38</sup> This is a crucial problem for the armed services, affecting the lowest and the highest ranks in equal measure: at some point, if care is not taken, everyone breaks under the pressure of war. See here particularly Grossman 2009.

<sup>39</sup> It is significant in this regard that over the course of the war, fewer and fewer commanding officers in Scottish and Scottish-styled regiments were willing to allow their remaining pipers to accompany their comrades into battle, or in many cases even to the front, believing that it was more important to ensure that troops returning from the front did so to the sound of the pipes and drums. See the information in Seton & Grant 1920 and summarised in Grant 2015.

more often associated with the First World War – including 'Tipperary'. In fact, contrary to what the officer class of the early twentieth century might have thought (discussed briefly in footnote 31), a pattern seems to emerge whereby particular, recently popular songs become synonymous with a particular conflict (an obvious and international example from the Second World War being 'Lili Marleen').<sup>40</sup> The passively voiced 'become synonymous' does, of course, mask a number of different processes, only some of which are consciously steered. All of the songs mentioned are, in their different ways, love songs – most popular songs are. When war broke out in 1914, many publishers rushed to produce songbooks with what they felt were the songs soldiers needed: a mixture of propaganda songs (including atrocity propaganda) and national songs deemed no doubt to fire the patriotic spirit.<sup>41</sup> These are not the songs that soldiers seem to choose to sing, however. Sentimental songs in particular, but also comic songs (including ones that relate to the ongoing conflict) are the ones to which they most often refer in their letters and memoirs.

It may be that 'Annie Laurie' was much more a song of the Crimean trenches than it was those of the Western Front. Nevertheless, I want to close with two other documented examples of soldiers in the Great War singing 'Annie Laurie'; both involve direct encounters between men on opposing sides in the conflict. The first of these concerns the Christmas Truce of 1914. The sound of carols and other songs coming from the enemy trenches was one of the triggers for the extensive fraternization between soldiers on opposite sides not only at Christmas, but for several weeks leading up to it. Mostly, the songs mentioned in this regard are Christmas carols, particularly those like 'Stille Nacht'/'Silent Night' that were familiar on both sides. But there are exceptions to this, and one of the other songs mentioned is 'Annie Laurie' – sung, however, not by a British Tommy, but by a German soldier, who seems to have picked this song precisely as a gesture of peace and reconciliation. This story is recounted in the memoirs of W. A. Quinton, which are held in the Imperial War Museum, and which are referenced in at least two of the many books available on the Christmas Truce.<sup>42</sup> Quinton recalls

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<sup>40</sup> There are several publications that deal with the phenomenon of 'Lili Marleen' as a soldiers' song in World War II (one enjoyed primarily via recordings and broadcasting rather than participatory singing); readers of German are well-advised to consult, in the first instance, Michael Walter's careful historical analysis: Walter 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Publications with new songs to old tunes, reacting to the current crisis (and reports of atrocities in Belgium) include *Marching Songs for Soldiers. Adapted to Well-Known Tunes* by A. C. Ainger (Ainger 1914); *Marching Songs for British Soldiers* (*Marching Songs* 1914a); both available in the British Library.

<sup>42</sup> Quinton served in the Bedfordshire Regiment, and arrived in France immediately before the First Battle of Ypres. The papers held in the Imperial War Museum (Documents.6705) consist of a typescript copy of the first part of his memoirs, and a handwritten copy of the second part; they were written in 1929. For copyright reasons I have

how he and his fellow soldiers were 'spellbound' by the sound of the German officer suddenly singing this song in perfect English. It was followed by the officer's suggestion that Christmas be taken as an opportunity to bury the dead of both sides whose bodies had remained in No Man's Land. After some negotiation – and hesitation on the side of many of the British officers, who feared a trap – this is what happened. The relations between the two sides became so good that when troops from further up the British line opened fire a few days later, the Germans subsequently waved over the top of their trenches to indicate to their Bedfordshire counterparts that they were all okay.

The second example is a recording, also German in origin although the singer is a Scot. It is one of the many recordings made by members of the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission, which was set up in 1915 to record speech, song and music from the men of so many nations held in German prisoner of war camps. The commission was led by the famous musicologist, Carl Stumpf; the recordings, which were made on wax cylinder, are now held in part by the Ethnological Museum in Berlin and in part (and in this case) by the Lautarchiv at the Humboldt University in Berlin, from where I was able to obtain a copy; the latter part of the collection can be searched using the British Library's online catalogue.<sup>43</sup> The singer is Angus Kelly from Glasgow; at the time the recording was made, five days after the Armistice in November 1918, he was 31 years old and it appears that he had by then been in the POW camp for about 4 years. The documentation accompanying the recording states that the song was 'from Campbell's Songs of Scotland'; in connection with another recording of Kelly from this source, of Burns's 'The Lea-Rig', Kelly mentions that he had known that song before finding it in the Campbell collection. It is unclear whether or not it was Kelly's idea to sing and recite 'Annie Laurie' or whether he was asked to do so: the primary aim of these recordings was a comparative study of languages and dialects, so it is possible that members of the commission requested this song. Whatever the case may be, here we do at least have one instance recorded for posterity of a Scottish survivor of the Great War singing 'Annie Laurie', not in the trenches, but in the prisoner of war camp at Ruhleben near Berlin.

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not quoted directly from this source here. Books which cite Quinton's reminiscences on the role of 'Annie Laurie' include Weintraub 2012 and Jürs 2013. For more information on the Christmas truce generally, see also Ferro, Brown, Cazals & Müller 2007.

<sup>43</sup> An ongoing project is seeking to digitalise and catalogue further parts of the collection, though there do not as yet seem to be any plans to make the material generally available online. It is possible to receive copies of some of the recordings held by the Humboldt University for research purposes. They can also be accessed on site at the British Library.

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